

In the preceding chapters it has been attempted to study the Vedic rituals from the sociological point of view. To wind up the whole discussion an attempt may be made to recapitulate its most salient points.

The term 'ritual' has variedly been defined by scholars by giving numerous definitions. However, in this treatise it has been proposed that 'Karamakāṇḍa' is the most appropriate term for ritual, which etymologically means a collection of series of successive acts to be performed at different occasions. The rituals could mainly be divided on the ground of individual welfare, family welfare and the community uplift. Their division points out that they aimed at both the emancipation of an individual as well as the progress of society. About the origin of rituals it could be stated that numerous reasons e.g. inspiration of nature and respect towards it, averting the wrath of gods, tendency towards pomp and show etc. are commonly responsible for it. It is the nature of ritual that it grows, alters and sometimes perishes. Ritual has a close relationship with religion, mythology and magic. The relationship between ritual and religion can be described as that between body and soul. Sometimes ritual aspect dominates the religion. The ritual forms a very considerable part of mythology. Both separately as well as jointly play an important part in the sacrificial-cult. About the relationship between ritual & magic it has been established that it is not permanent. The ritual may include the magical ideas, but it remains the fact that it is not always magical in its nature. At the same time a magical ritual also need not take the form of a public ritual. However, existence

of magic in Vedic ritual cannot be denied.

In the performance of Śrauta rituals people of different strata of society used to participate. The person, responsible for organising the Śrauta rituals, was known as 'yajamāna' who was the pivot around whom the entire ritual procedure revolved. The performance of rituals was carried for his benefit and through him for the rest of the society. It was not the case that rituals could be performed by all and sundry. The eligibility of their performer, i.e. the yajamāna, was determined from various points of view e.g. varṇa, physique, education, connubial, financial position etc. From the Śrauta-rituals it comes to light that with their right performance nothing was impossible or unattainable for the yajamāna. It could be established that rituals had no value until and unless there was a yajamāna to perform them and thus their practical value entirely depended upon him from various respects. Complete purity was observed in the rituals. The yajamāna had to become pure by taking bath before the beginning of rituals. Dikṣā rituals were also performed upon him.

The Śrauta-rituals make it obvious that wife of the yajamāna, who was regarded as component to her husband, had no less contribution in their performance. Her presence was necessary in the sacrifices. Women of first three varṇas viz. brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya and Vaiśya, used to perform śrauta rituals along with their husbands. However, in some of the rituals the presence of yajamāna's wife was optional. Some of the rituals could only be performed by her. There were certain rituals which endorsed her chastity. It would be worthstating here that apart from the wife/ves of the yajamāna other women of various spheres were also given due representation in the performance of śrauta rituals. That the ambition

of women to get a male child had remained ever since, is clear from the Śrauta rituals. Women enjoyed a status equal to men in Vedic Society.

For the performance of Śrauta rituals 'ṛtviks' were among the most important performers. Their large number manifests that Śrauta rituals could only be performed by wealthy persons. Through the rituals a yajamāna used to fulfil his various desires for which the expert ṛtviks were required. A yajamāna used to satisfy himself that the persons, to whom he had to choose his ṛtviks, possessed certain qualities. Among the ṛtviks, Adhvaryu was the main performer of rituals. The ṛtviks performed rituals on behalf of the yajamāna. The performance of various rituals shows that the ambitions were fulfilled through them and the ṛtviks used to execute their respective duties with sincerity and full devotion for the betterment of yajamāna.

'Varṇa-Vyavasthā' was most conspicuously prevalent in Vedic-society. The śrauta rituals reveal that Vedic-society was an ideal society in which a co-operation among the varṇas preserved the social energy and unity. The śrauta rituals show that in society people of all categories rendered their respective services. Brāhmaṇas performed sacrifices both for themselves and others. Kṣatriyas executed the law and performed yajñas at the same time. Vaiśyas provided food for society and carried the performance of rituals as well. Though the sūdras did not perform śrauta rituals for themselves, yet they helped others in their ~~yajñas~~ yajñas. In the śrauta rituals people of mixed varṇas also used to lend their helping hand. Evidently, it were only the śrauta rituals which brought the people close to each other and established the social solidarity in Vedic society. The śrauta rituals show no jealousy among various varṇas as there was mutual co-operation and understanding.

Distribution of dakṣiṇā was also thought to be an important śrauta ritual. From the dakṣiṇās, given in yajñas, it could wrongly be assumed that in the Vedic society a group of sluggish people had been formulated who lived and enjoyed their lives by accepting and doting upon the amount of dakṣiṇā.¹ But, the truth is something other. Dakṣiṇā was given to the ṛtviks as a payment for the labour they did in respect of the performance of śrauta-rituals. Things given in dakṣiṇā manifest that Vedic society was a rich society and dakṣiṇā, at its base, was as the socio-economic arrangement. Some other payments, which could be taken as dakṣiṇā, were also made to other participants who performed some manual duties or provided indirect help. In this way people, belonging to different varṇas or professions, got their share through yajña.

In the śrauta rituals various materials were offered to the deities. The offering-materials, consisting of various substances and their preparations, show the acquaintance and skill of Vedic people in the science of cooking. The mention of a number of grains points out the progressive stage of agriculture in Vedic society. The śrauta rituals introduce a person to various implements and weapons, and at the same time bring the fact to light that Vedic people had a pre-eminence over diversified trades and arts.

The śrauta sacrifices included the rituals of prāyaścitta also, which were meant for removing the mistakes committed therein. Even a single mistake was not tolerated. With the performance of prāyaścittas the sacrifice was supposed to yield the desired result. These rituals had an equal significance in Vedic society as the general rituals. If we fix our eye on the śrauta rituals as a whole, it could be stated that the Vedic society was an ideal one in which

wealth and property were divided among the people through yajña. That the society was a perfect and happy one is axiomatic from the śrauta rituals. The rituals had become the centre of the social life of the Vedic people.

It would not be out of way to find out the possibility of śrauta rituals in the modern times. It is a matter of great satisfaction that śrauta rituals, though in a restricted and slightly modified form, are still in practice, particularly in South-India.² In the north-Indian society too some of the śrauta rituals exist.³ The śrauta ritual show that at the 'Pindapitr-yajña' three rice-balls were prepared and, if compared to the modern practice, it is found that the ritual of preparing three rice-balls is still in vogue. The Vedic rituals show that a widow could perform rituals (with śraddhā and satya (AITAREYA BRĀHMAṆA VII.10.)). Similarly, in these days also widow men and women are found performing religious ceremonies. To observe the fast before performing a yajña was a śrauta ritual which could also be seen in modern society. People observe fast before performing any religious ceremony. Agnihotra, though in a changed form, is also in vogue. In the evening and morning, when fire is enkindled in the houses, something like milk, bread, sugar etc. is offered into it (however without mantra and knowing the purpose). In the vedic society, after the arrival of new crop, the grains were not consumed without performing the Āgrayana-īṣṭi in which, sometimes, food prepared from these grains was given to the Brāhmanas to consume (Ś' Br.II.4.3.13). The practice of non-consumption of fresh grains, without providing their food to the brāhmanas, is also in vogue. In the śrauta rituals, for example at Āsvamedha and Puruṣamedha, the victim animals were set free after the 'paryagni-karana' ritual. The practice of releasing the victim animals, especially the he-goats, is also in vogue. The victims taken to

certain temples⁴ for the presiding deities are set free after performing some rituals.

Evidently, the impact, left by the śrauta rituals, on the modern society is clearly visible even after such a long period. Several ritualistic terms e.g. āhuti, pūrṇāhuti, agni, kumbha, kūrca, kuśa, jāra (lover), darbha, prāyaścitta, vrata, dīksā, homa, yajña, dakṣiṇā, yajamāna etc. are still used in the same sense. To sum up, the śrauta rituals are a means of preservation of ancient traditions of Vedic society.

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REFERENCES

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१. Cf. Joshi, Lakshmana Shastri: Vedic Sanskriti kā Vikāsa (Hindi tr. by Pararakara, M. D.), p. 28.
२. Cf. Haug M: The Aitareya Brāhmanam of the Rgveda, Vol. I, Intro. p. 3 (below); Kashikar, C. G.: The Vedic Sacrificial Rituals Through the Ages; SP. 26th ICO, New Delhi, 1964, p. 142; Sharma, K. V.: Dakṣiṇa -a Bharata Men Vedon Kā Pracāra: Vishva Jyoti, Veda-anika, April-May 1972, p. 72 below.
३. The present author has personally observed these practices in the villages, particularly in Himachal Pradesh.
४. The present author visited certain temples viz. Chintpurni (Distt. Kangra, H.P.), Jawalamukhi (Distt. Kangra, H.P.) and Dayodha-siddha (Distt. Hamirpur, H.P.) and observed the practice of releasing the victim animals.

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